

ARCHIVED[To Contents](#)[To Previous Page](#)[To Next Page](#)[To Publication Page](#)[To Home Page](#)

National Drug Intelligence Center

OxyContin Diversion and Abuse

January 2001

Overview

Diversion and abuse of the prescription pain reliever OxyContin is a major problem, particularly in the eastern United States. The Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) reports that, in the United States, oxycodone products, including OxyContin, are frequently abused pharmaceuticals. The pharmacological effects of OxyContin make it a suitable substitute for heroin; therefore, it is attractive to the same abuser population. Law enforcement reports indicate heroin abusers are obtaining OxyContin because the pharmaceutical drug offers reliable strength and dosage levels. In addition, if the abusers' health insurance covers an illness that the drug treats, the insurance provider may cover the cost of the drug. Conversely, OxyContin abusers who have never used heroin may be attracted to the lower priced heroin when their health insurance no longer pays for OxyContin prescriptions or when they cannot afford the high street-level price of OxyContin. For example the West Virginia, Hancock-Brooke-Weirton Drug Task Force reports that a local couple, recently sentenced for conspiracy to sell heroin, turned to heroin after their doctor refused to continue prescribing OxyContin and they could not afford the street price of the pharmaceutical. OxyContin abusers sometimes commit theft, armed robbery, and fraud to sustain their habits.

The illegal diversion, distribution, and abuse of oxycodone products, particularly OxyContin, appear to be concentrated most heavily in the East, according to respondents to the National Drug Intelligence Center (NDIC) National Drug Threat Survey 2000 and DEA reporting. OxyContin Tablet, commonly referred to as OxyContin, has become the oxycodone product of choice in Maine, Ohio, and West Virginia, and in portions of eastern Kentucky, Maryland, western Pennsylvania, and rural southwestern Virginia.

Bottles of OxyContin



*Photo courtesy of Roger Kerekes, Johnstown
Tribune-Democrat*

[To Top](#)[To Contents](#)

Kentucky-The Kentucky State Police reports that OxyContin is the drug of choice in eastern Kentucky. The Kentucky State Police in Hazard report a significant shift from cocaine and methamphetamine abuse to OxyContin and Tylox abuse. Tylox is another trade name oxycodone product.

Maine-The U.S. Attorney, District of Maine, identifies OxyContin as the most significant drug threat in the state.

Maryland-The Maryland Drug Early Warning System, a real-time substance abuse monitoring program, identifies oxycodone as a leading emerging drug of abuse in 2000. The DEA reports nearly 85 percent of 1999 arrests for writing false prescriptions in Maryland involved oxycodone products, including OxyContin.

Ohio-The Cincinnati Police Department's Pharmaceutical Diversion Squad reports a growing OxyContin threat. From January to October 2000, illicit drug dealers in Cincinnati diverted over 9,000 doses of OxyContin (31 percent of all diverted oxycodone products). During the same time period, 49 of the squad's 341 diversion investigations targeted OxyContin, resulting in 22 arrests.

Pennsylvania-The Cambria County Drug Task Force reports that, as of September 2000, almost 30 percent of its undercover drug purchases involved OxyContin, and 31 suspects were accused of distributing tens of thousands of dollars' worth of OxyContin.

West Virginia-The Gilbert Police Department reports OxyContin is the "worst" drug the department has ever encountered, with OxyContin abuse even surpassing marijuana abuse.

[To Top](#) [To Contents](#) [To Previous Page](#) [To Next Page](#)

[To Publication Page](#) [To Home Page](#)

End of page.
